

# Castlemaine Naturalist

August 2001

Vol. 25.7 #280



## **Swift Parrot Survey**

Note that the follow-up Swift Parrot Survey is being held  
on **Saturday Aug. 4**, meet at 27 Doveton Street.

First session 7.00am

Take breakfast as well as binocs and join us for breakfast in  
the bush!

Second Session 4pm, same meeting place.

Come to either or both!

**The reason for this change is that we have been  
advised that we are far more likely to find the birds at  
this time of day at their roosting sites, that in the  
middle of the day.**

## **Highway Cleanup, 1 1/8, 9am.**

For arrangements see P. 7 under "From the Business Meeting"

## **The Big Birthday Birdwatch**

or, "How to Become a Rally Driver"

On July 1 seven of us enjoyed a beautiful sunny day trying to get 'off the beaten track' doing random surveys, mainly in the Tooberac-Pyalong 10 minute grid. It was very pleasing to have two younger Field Naturalists, Sam Panter and Lachlan Moody with us, keen to learn more about the birds in the area; in fact, we envied their acute eyesight. Sam was quick to notice two Spotted Pardalotes at our first stop, flying in and out of a hole in the earth bank by the dirt road. Obviously the mild weather is encouraging them to investigate nesting sites. At most survey points we found the Pardalotes very evident and completely oblivious of our presence.

Our main survey area, including lunch, was off the Tooberac-Seymour road in woodland on the perimeter fence of Puckapunyal. The birds were very active in the gully, and how we would have loved to explore over the fence line as we had tantalising glimpses of birds such as the White-browed Babblers.

We experimented with unsealed roads, working our way towards the Seymour-Pyalong road, which at times deteriorated, but we were able to negotiate any boggy areas without mishap. 'Oh what a feeling - Toyota'! At all our random survey sites the Winter afternoon sun highlighted the beauty of the countryside.



The bird list for the day, made up of 45 species was -

|                            |                         |                          |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Superb Fairy-wren          | Eastern Rosella         | Sulphur-crested Cockatoo |
| Red Wattlebird             | Yellow-faced,           | Galah                    |
| Noisy Miner                | White-naped,            | Long-billed Corellas     |
| Crimson Rosella            | Fuscous,                | Magpie                   |
| Grey Fantail               | White-plumed and        | Magpie-lark              |
| White-browed Scrub-wren    | White-eared Honeyeaters | Red-rumped Parrot        |
| White-throated Treecreeper | Weebill                 | Wood Ducks               |
| Brown Treecreeper          | Scarlet and             | Hardheads                |
| Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike  | Flame Robins            | Pacific Black Duck       |
| White-browed Babbler       | Buff-rumped,            | Little Pied Cormorant    |
| Tree Martin                | Yellow-rumped,          | Masked Lapwing           |
| Willie Wagtail             | Brown and               | Australian Raven         |
| Welcome swallow            | Striated Thornbills     | Brown Falcon             |
| Jacky Winter               | Spotted and             | Little Eagle             |
| Aust. White Ibis           | Striated Pardalotes     | Eurasian Coot            |

Margaret Badminton

### **Crows, Cattle and Coolibahs**

On Sunday July 1 a group of friends, who also happen to be field naturalists, set off for south-western Queensland for a fortnight. Maggie Oliver had invited us to join her on an indulgent journey to the kind of country that she has loved since she was a girl. It was a great opportunity for us all, and, for me, meant very hurried arrangements at the last minute, but I made it, only forgetting stamps (no-one got the post cards 'til I got home) and a spare slide film. I had to settle for print film which doesn't really do justice to the glorious reds of the sand and the blue-greys of the mulgas.

We drove to Hillston, north-east of Hay, on the first day, travelling in fog from Goornong to the other side of Moama. That part of the trip as I remembered was flat plain with low shrubs, but on the way back I found that the Hay Plains only stretched for about 80 km in reality. Long before we got to Hillston we were actually in wattle scrubs.

We arrived in Hillston in time to go for a walk around the artificial lake not far from the motel, and witnessed the unforgettable sight of hundreds of Galahs coming in to roost, wheeling and settling, wheeling and settling, glowing in the red light of the setting sun. It was breathtaking - and deafening.

Next day we were off to Cunnamulla for the night. This time we were driving for most of the way through mixed vegetation; wattle scrubs, Mallees, Callitris interspersed with bare patches, grasses and occasional watercourses. Ern and Lesley Perkins had a list of "trees to see" and were well on the way to finding them all by the time we got into Cunnamulla that night. Maggie and I were the only ones to have seen the Red-tailed Black Cockatoos at Bourke, though.

We stocked up for the next few days in the morning at Cunnamulla then set out west for Dynevor Downs. Maggie had been told that the shearers' quarters and woolshed were a stone's throw from the road, and they were. At first we doubted (well, one or two did) if "that" could possibly be our accommodation for the next few nights, but it was, and by the time we cleaned red dust off everything, and rearranged



folding metal beds in our chosen corrugated iron walled rooms we were quite content, especially as we had hot showers to use! It was all very basic, but quite comfortable, and by the time four of us had gone for our first walk, and had a cuppa on the fly-wire enclosed verandah afterwards, we were very pleased with Maggie's choice of accommodation! Within 200m of the quarters George Broadway had found a party of Grey-crowned Babblers and Lesley and Ern had found Jacky Winters and Zebra Finches, to say nothing of Eremophyllas, like *Eremophylla longifolia*, Acacias, Mistletoes, including a green flowering one, Harlequin Mistletoe, and Sennas (Cassias). Somebody saw Double-barred Finches, but I missed them. We even found fish in the bore drain. Meanwhile Phee and Maggie had enjoyed a leisurely read on the verandah and a wander around the sheep yards and had found Black-fronted Dotterels.

A walk in the other direction later in the afternoon was quite different, with far more trees (the air strip was part of the first one) and we added Hooded Robins and Mallee Ringnecks to our growing list. A couple of days later Phee and Maggie joined us, and we went further into this particular bush paddock. It had been scoured by rain and the soil showed red. We found more Beefwoods, and Eucalyptus terminalis in flower. Even in bud this is a very showy tree, with great bunches of buds or flowers at the ends of the branches. We spotted many honeyeaters busy in the flowers, including Black and Striped, but the surprise was to see Black-faced Woodswallows apparently feeding on nectar. In this paddock we also saw Red-winged Parrots, Mallee Ringnecks, Bluebonnets and Major Mitchell Cockatoos.

We drove to Lake Bindegolly from Dynevor for a day, taking our lunch with us on the walking track. We couldn't get right out to the viewing platform as part of the track was under water, but the walk was a delight, with Variegated and White-winged (female) Wrens, Freckled Ducks, Spotted Bowerbird, Hardheads, Chestnut-crowned Babblers, and Blue-billed Ducks added to the list, to say nothing of the large mixed flocks of cormorants and Caspian and Whiskered Terns flying up and down the lake.

At night there was entertainment; comparing the meals that the cooks of the day produced, yarning and laughing over the remains on the table and over the dishes (we were probably heard for miles around!), looking up reference books, standing out under the brilliant night sky watching the stars, or waiting for the moon to rise, and even indulging in a couple of games of Trivial Pursuit!

On Friday we left for Quilpie, stopping again at Lake Bindegolly and getting a list of 17 birds in the 20 minutes or so we were there. At Thargomindah we filled up with petrol, ready for the drive up to Quilpie, and for the first time we had to drive on a dirt road, with lots of dust. Most of the roads were narrow strips of asphalt, and we had to move over for oncoming or following traffic. We also had to be continually on the alert for Emus, cattle, sheep, wild pigs and kangaroos on the road, but we soon learned to judge if they were likely to be a problem or not, but always slowed down just the same! Flocks of crows and ravens signalled any road kills ahead.

Our accommodation on Tenham, we were told, was "just off the main road a bit" - 14kms is "just off the road"! We found by the end of our stay that "just through Windorah" (where the Bustards were) is 150km, and "up the road a bit" is 30 km! We were learning!



Tenham's shearers' quarters were also quite comfortable by the time we'd had a cleanup, but instead of the rooms opening onto a verandah, these opened into a wide passageway with a concrete floor and, again, had corrugated iron walls. We were made very welcome by our hosts who visited us that night, and were invited to go out to Windorah the following day to the Bronco Branding competitions, and to have lunch there - Gaye, our hostess, was in charge of the catering.

On the way we stopped for morning tea at one of the Cooper Creek crossings. There were magnificent old River Red Gums, dozens of Black (Fork Tailed) Kites and Whistling Kites, and almost as many White-necked Herons, cormorants, spoonbills, Greater Egrets, and campers.

The Bronco Branding proved to be very interesting with the big "Broncos" which are really big draught horses strong enough to drag the big calves to the rail where the rest of the team threw, sat on, and "branded" their rump and poll with paint! One team had a girl doing the throwing and branding.

On the way back to Tenham we drove around a Nature Trail which has been done very well, with the local names for many of the plants. We suggested to our host later that perhaps the botanical name could be included, even if it was necessary to get out of the car to read it, because those who are interested in botanical names are usually happy to get out of the car any way.

At the end of the Trail George boiled the billy, so we had proper billy tea, with a Coolibah leaf, on the bank of Cooper Creek!

We stopped at a couple of red sand hills before we got back to the Tenham turnoff, and found quite different vegetation, including Regal Bird Flowers *Crotalaria cunninghamii* and Loose-flowered Rattlepods *C. eremaea* which looked magnificent against the red sand. We found all sorts of little flowers there, too.

Most of our walks on Tenham were along the Kyabra Creek and environs, and it was on one of these walks that Lesley spotted Spinifex Pigeons, which, with their tall crest, rich red-brown colouring and faces marked like Egyptian Pharaohs, were quite a sight as they bustled about on their short legs looking for seed under the Mulgas. They belong to the Bronzewing group of pigeons, as do the Crested Pigeons which we saw almost every day of the trip.

On our last night at Tenham a local told us about all the marvellous things we'd missed - like where the Plains Turkeys were (only the Broadways had seen the pair earlier in the trip), where the lake was we didn't go far enough to find, and where the Red-tailed Black Cockatoos were.

Our hostess, who had already taken Phee and Maggie to see the rock holes, and for a drive around some of the interesting sights on the station, offered to take the others if we turned up at 7.30 the morning we left - which we certainly did. The rock holes are a mystery, but look like they might be old aboriginal water holes, but without the rocks which were used to cover such spots. One of them had water in it, about 15 cm deep, and a lily-like plant, possibly a wrinklewort, growing in it. It was only in bud, so we didn't see the flowers. It has been there for as long as the Tullys can remember, and completely disappears when the water dries up, to appear again when the hole refills. We were shown a disused Wedgetails' nest about 12 feet up



one of the trees where the children liked to sit when they were small. As we were driven around Kangaroos, mainly Reds, bounded away from the vehicle.

Our hosts invited us to stay on, and in the light of what Geoffrey (the local) had told us, it would have been wonderful, but we were moving to the next station. Unfortunately the quarters there were more than even we were prepared to tackle, so we drove on the Quilpie for one night and then Charleville, where we stayed two nights, visiting on the afternoon we arrived a Eucalypt farm where they were grown for the cut flower market.

On the second day we had spent much of our time visiting the new Tregole National Park where we walked the Nature Trail, seeing, and at last being able to name in some cases, Bottle Trees, more Erimophyllas, Wait-a-while (a careful look soon showed why it is called that!), Yellow Mistletoe, mulgas and Gidgea. We also saw the Northern Yellow Robin there, another Mistletoebird (Mistletoes were extremely prevalent everywhere we went), the northern form of the Buff-rumped Thornbill and Sitellas, which were the pale headed ones, not nearly as prettily marked as the local ones. (Definite bias there!) That evening we visited the Department of Parks and Wildlife for the Bilby lecture and viewing. There is a captive breeding program at the centre, run by a most interesting and dedicated fellow who gives all his spare time to the project, and works hard towards getting funding for fencing an area in Currawinya National Park south west of Cunnamulla ready for the release of the Bilbies. He is encouraging people to buy a panel of fence for \$20 and is still seeking more donors, though it is nearing the goal. Some animals have already been released, including some on Scotia Downs in south-western NSW.

Over the fortnight we often saw Grey and Pied Butcherbirds, large flocks of Apostle-birds (far more than 12 at a time), White-plumed and Spiney-cheeked Honeyeaters, Australian Ravens and Little Crows, (the latter seemed to have a different stance from the ravens, and a narrower beak). Confusion really set in when we got back to where Little Ravens were part of the scene, too. From then on they were all BBBs - Big Black Birds! I was surprised at the number of White-necked Herons we saw, too, and we saw Brolgas several times, including three just across the creek from the Tenham shearers' quarters one morning as we breakfasted.

From Charleville we turned for home, saying farewell to the Broadways, who were off to Canberra, at Bourke, and Perkins at Cobar. Maggie and I took another day and stayed overnight at Hay, before driving on home via Deniliquin.

Even our trip home was full of interest; adding Mulga Parrots to the bird list, getting a good look at the Red-tailed Black Cockatoos and visiting the Darling at Bourke, and seeing a flock, not just one or two, of Major Mitchells south of Cunnamulla.

I expected to see extensive areas where there was little of interest, even to me, and I expected poorer roads, and I am very glad to report that I was wrong in both cases.

I had a wonderful time, and we had seen over 110 species of birds, lots of flowers and new plants, and shared some great new experiences.

Rita Mills



## Observations

When Margaret Badminton went out to get wood for her fire at 11.30pm the night of the Wimbledon Tennis finals she heard a fluttering and looked up to find, not a bat as she expected, but a male Scarlet Robin fluttering against the light, which she promptly turned off. It must have roosted on the fluorescent tube at dusk. No harm was done, for it was in the garden next day. On the 19th July she reported that she had disturbed the bird again the evening before at seven. It was still roosting on the fluorescent light!

- While at Protea Gallery on 20/7 I heard the distinct tinkling calls of Bell Miners in the vicinity of Butterfly area of the Gardens. Rita Mills
- Gunter Leibel has had an Echidna at his place at Green Gully - not so unusual? Gunter couldn't work out how it had climbed three stone steps and was wandering around his courtyard. He has also found Wood Ducks feeding on Capeweed, and he has a hedge of Lucerne Trees, one of which was infested with mistletoe.
- A Chough seen pecking on a piece of bark in Natalie de Maccus' garden got its foot caught in a crack it had made. The whole flock soon came to the rescue, pecking away at the bark until the foot was released. She also discovered a single plant of *Cynoglossum suaviolens*, Sweet Hounds-tongue, near Barkers Creek, which is a first report for that area. She is regularly hearing Bell Miners in the area, and one was seen drinking at her bird bath.
- Geraldine Harris and two carloads of LandCare people observed and Antichinus on the edge of White Gum Road about 7.30 one evening. She also reported that a hole in their creek bank was being worked by a water rat.
- Stuart Morris had four Grey Currawongs around their Doveton Street garden over 2 days.
- The Moody family from Redesdale reported Wood Ducks searching for hollows and Magpies nest building.
- Chris Morris reported White-browed Scrub-wrens attacking their reflections in the windows of his Little Bendigo home. Potatoes with feathers stuck in them seemed a deterrent!
- On 26/7, a fine sunny day, there were reports from three different areas of Magpies going through mating rituals. Galahs were also spotted with sprigs of fresh gumleaves, which is part of their mating behaviour.
- Brenda Envall's son found a Koala near Mt. Alexander which appeared to be having difficulties, even in climbing. He contacted a Wildlife Refuge and the carer was able to easily capture the animal and take it to a vet. It proved to have cataract blindness.

## Stonemaker Fungus

Closely related to the Blackfellows' Bread fungus that was featured last month are the Stonemaker Fungi. One, *Polyporus tumulosus*, is mainly found in mountain forests, and the other, *P. basilapiloides*, is found in drier sandy areas such as the Mallee. Both have large underground stone-like masses of soil particles bound with fungal tissue, which store the food reserves of the fungus like sclerotia of the Blackfellows' Bread, but in the case of the former two it is known as *false* sclerotia. The "stones" are quite hard and can be so heavy that one person cannot lift them. As with Blackfellows'



Bread, the Stonemakers normally require a fire to induce them to send up fruiting bodies.

Information from The Field Companion to Australian Fungi by Bruce Fuhrer.

### **\*\*\* Bendigo Native Flower Show \*\*\***

The Bendigo Native Plant Group, together with the Bendigo Field Naturalists' Club are holding a Native Flower Show in the Senior Citizens Hall, Golden Square on Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 1 and 2 from 10 am to 4 pm each day.

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING, 27/7

**Swift Parrot Survey** -to be held on Sat, Aug. 4., see p1.

**Highway cleanup** - Saturday Aug. 11. Meet at 9 am at Tait's Carriages. The more the merrier, and the quicker it will be done! There will be no cleanup if it is foggy or raining - this is a rule made by VicRoads. Wear sturdy footwear.

**Broom-Pull and Signs.** Due to circumstances beyond our control the **Official Launch of the signs** has had to be **postponed BUT** the Broom Pull is still on. However it is to be held over two mornings, Wed. 15 Aug. as previously announced and Wed 22 Aug. Bring something to kneel on, and wear suitable clothing and footwear. BYO morning tea. Come on one or both mornings and spend as much or little time as suits you, but every little bit helps, and there are thousands of seedlings to be pulled.

**Wednesday Wildflower Walks** are to be held again this year, on Sept. 19 and 26, and Oct. 3 and 10. These walks are usually only for an hour or so at locations close to the town. The meeting place is 27 Doveton St. at 4 pm.

**Paddys Ranges Campout, with VNPA.** The Box-Ironbark Rally Camp is on 6 and 7 October. If you are interested in going, even for a day, contact Jason on 9650 8296 or e-mail [jasond@vnpa.org.au](mailto:jasond@vnpa.org.au).

**VFNC Grampians Campout, 26 - 30 Oct.** Copies of the second information sheet and booking form are now available.

Ararat FNC are asking for **booking forms to be back as soon as possible**. details of costs are in CN 279. If you are interested in going please pick up the information sheet and booking sheets.

**Subscriptions** are half price in the second half of the year, and are current until the Annual Meeting in February.

### **CFNC Campout, Pomonal, Sept. 27 - 30**

Please let me know if you are going, especially if you will be camping, by Wed. Aug. 15. If you have booked your own site, please let me know, too. We have a tentative booking for 5 sites, but it needs to be confirmed by then. So far arrangements are - Friday afternoon - Orchids at the Nook at Moyston with Tristan Kennedy and Saturday, visit and picnic lunch at a nearby native plant and protea wholesale nursery.

Rita Mills (Ph. 5472 4553 AH)



## CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST, AUGUST 2001 PROGRAM

**General Meetings** are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

**Excursions** leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days. Also note that outdoor events are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions.

**Business Meetings** are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

**VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS**

Fri. Aug. 10. **Weed Control in the Mount Alexander Shire.** Speaker is Darren Bos, Environmental Project Officer for Mount Alexander Shire. UCA hall, 8 pm.

Sat. Aug. 11 **Wellsford Forest, Epsom.** Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm sharp. Take afternoon tea. Leader, C. Morris.

Wed Aug. 15 and Wed 22 Aug. **Cape Broom Pull Start at 9am**, mornings only. NB See note on p 7.

Fri. Sept. 14, **Nicaragua.** speaker is Neil Norris. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat Sept. 15. **Terrick Terrick.** All day outing Leave 27 Doveton St. at 10 am. Take morning and afternoon tea, lunch, and a drink as well as binocs etc. Leader M. Oliver

**Wednesday Wildflower Walks.** Meet at 27 Doveton St. at 4pm. We are usually back in town by 5.30. Leaders: Sept. 19 Margaret Panter, Sept. 26 Geraldine Harris, Oct. 3 Stuart Morris, Oct. 10 John Cole.

Thurs. 27 - Sun 30 Sept. **Club Campout at Paradise Gardens (Redman Bluff ) Camping Ground**, Long Gully Road, Pomonal. The Secretary has a brochure about the camping ground. Bookings need to be finalized by Mid-August. - contact Rita Mills, 5472 4553 AH.

Fri. Oct. 12. **Logging in Victoria** Speaker is Marcus Ward. 8pm UCA hall.

Sat Oct. 13 **Cobaw Forest.** Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm sharp.

Fri. 26 - Tue. 30 Oct. **VFNCA Campout at Hall's Gap.** Preliminary details p6, CN 279, booking sheet and more info. now available at meeting., see p 7.

Fri. Nov. 9. **Farming with the Future in View.** Geraldine and Geoff Harris will tell us what they are doing for conservation and farming on their property at Barkers Creek.

Sat Nov. 10 A look around the **Harris Property.** Leave 23 Mostyn St. at 1.30 sharp. Take afternoon tea.

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**Disclaimer** - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the club.

**2001 Committee** E. Perkins (President) ph 5472 3124, C. Morris (V.P. and Grievance Officer), G. Broadway (Sec.) ph. 5472 2513, J. Turnbull (treas.) ph. 5474 3005, R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), M. Dredge, M. Oliver, B. Maund, B. Envall.

**Subscriptions for 2001 -**

Ordinary Membership: Single \$22 Family, \$30 Pensioner or student: Single \$19 Family \$24 Supporting: \$31 The subscription also covers postage of the 'Castlemaine Naturalist'.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine. 3450.

Incorporation # A0003010B